

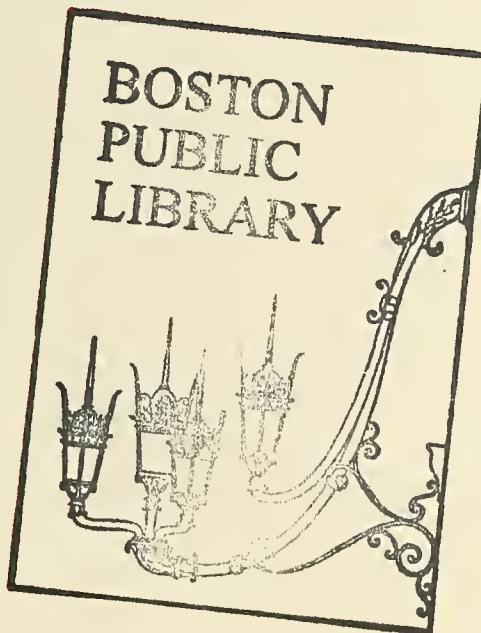
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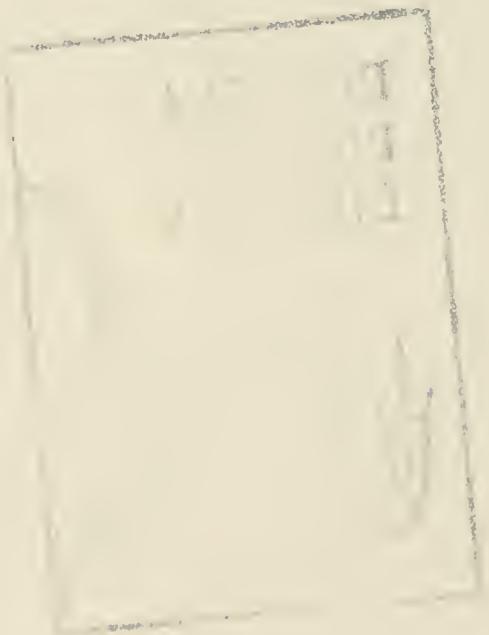
SOUTH COVE/CHINATOWN

Background Information, Planning Issues and  
Preliminary Neighborhood Improvement Strategies



City of Boston  
Boston Redevelopment Authority  
District Planning Program

June 1975



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A. SHORT HISTORY

The South Cove/Chinese community in Boston is in an area that was created by the filling of the tidal flats on either side of Washington Street, the Roxbury neck that connected the original Boston peninsula with the town of Roxbury. Bay Village, and the streets to the west of Washington Street were once part of the Back Bay, and the streets to the east of Washington Street were part of the original harbor. In the early 1800's filling started on both sides of Washington Street and significant development started to take place in the 1830's. The original development schemes and street layouts were directed towards industrial uses, but an economic decline in the late 1830's slowed development, and resulted in a shift of use to almost exclusively residential. Over the years Bay Village has retained much of the scale and character of the original development, and there have not been significant changes in the middle of the Bay Village area. The rest of the area has undergone much more change over the last century. Industrial development did occur in the South Cove area, and eventually a haphazard land use pattern evolved with railroads, leather and garment manufactures, and a wide variety of commercial and institutional uses mixed in with the residential area. The area became the home for successive waves of Irish, Jewish, Syrian, and finally Chinese immigrants. The Chinese arrived in about 1890 and have been the predominant residents of the area since then.

For most of the twentieth century, South Cove could be characterized as an area in slow decline; as industries left the area, and the quality of housing stock gradually declined. In the last 20 years more dramatic changes have started to take place in the area. The construction of the South East Expressway and the Massachusetts Turnpike were the first signs of change, and for the residents of the area they were an unwelcome development. The road construction took much of the housing occupied by Chinese community, introduced many more automobiles into the immediate area, and radically separated the South End from South Cove, splitting the Chinese community.

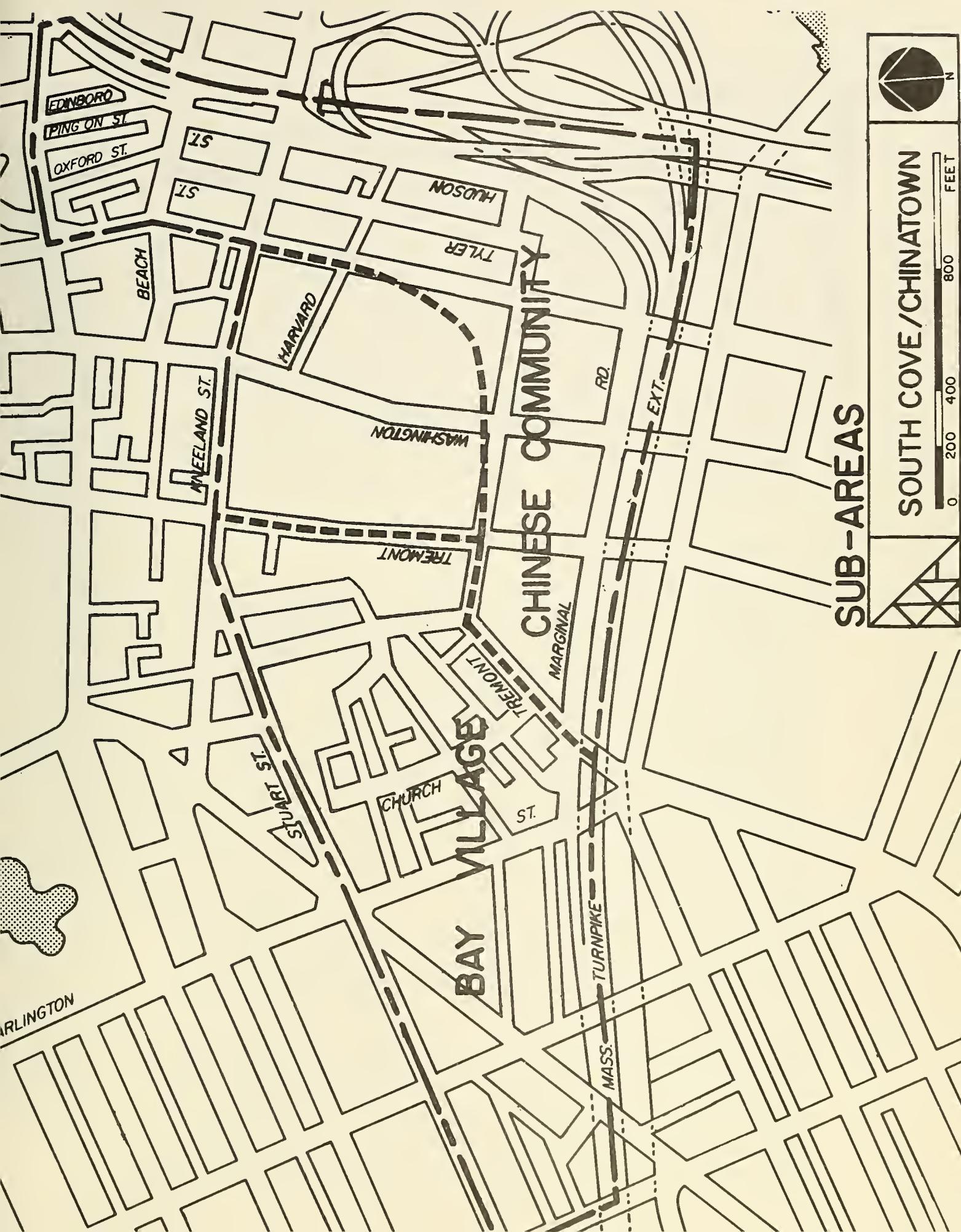
The South Cove Urban Renewal Project begun in 1966, and was aimed at accommodating the increased needs of the Tufts New England Medical Center, and the need to replace much of the deteriorated existing housing that remained south of Kneeland Street. As a result considerable demolition and relocation took place, and the Chinese community moved geographically from its original location. Likewise the scale of the area has changed from one of 3 to 5 story rowhouses to a mix of rowhouses, 10 to 20 story housing developments, and institutional buildings.

The recent physical changes in the Chinese community, have coincided with, but are unrelated to increasing numbers of immigrants arriving from Taiwan and Hong Kong in the last ten years due to changes in the U.S. immigration laws. This has changed the demographic mix of the community, and has caused a severe housing shortage in and near the heart of the Chinese community.

B. EXISTING CHARACTERISTICS

The compilation of statistical data on the South Cove/Chinatown area is difficult due to the small size of the area and because the area is split between two large census tracts. The information that is known is from the "Census Information By Blocks" and other demographic surveys that have been done. In the Chinese community the accurate statistics on population, housing, and other information is very difficult to derive. The Chinese community is largely made up of first generation Americans, and it is estimated that between 60 and 80% of the population do not speak English. This factor coupled with an unknown number of illegal aliens, and many residents reluctant to have anything to do with the government make information gathering very difficult.

For definition purposes, the Chinese community is bounded by the expressway, Essex Street, Harrison Avenue, Kneeland Street, Tyler Street, Oak Street, Tremont Street and the Massachusetts Pike, the Bay Village area is that area bounded by Tremont Street, Stuart Street, Columbus Avenue, and the Massachusetts Pike and includes Cortes and Isabella Streets.



## **SUB-ÁREAS**

SOUTH COVE / CHINATOWN

三

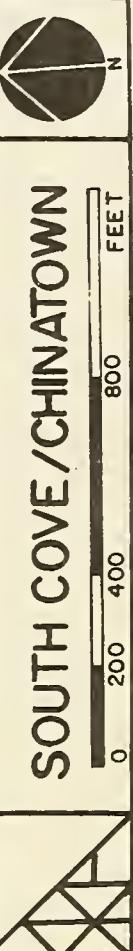
11

800

100

100

9



## BAY VILLAGE

Although the character of the center of Bay Village has changed very little from the time the streets were laid out and the houses built in the middle of the 1800's, the extremities of the area has gradually been encroached upon by commercial and institutional uses and the number of houses in the area is only about half of what it once was. The predominant character of the area is still 3 and 4 story rowhouses on small streets. It is Bay Village's relation to the rest of the City however, that has undergone great change over the years. The area has gone from an outlying residential suburb to being right in the middle of the downtown. The area in recent years has become a very urban neighborhood with many different life styles and income groups. The residents enjoy living in a small neighborhood, but also like being within the downtown core. The population nowadays is small with only 900 people in the area. There is a low degree of resident ownership, with only 10% of the buildings being owner-occupied. The condition of the housing stock is quite good, both due to a large number of federally funded low interest loans under the BRA's renewal efforts and a strong rental market that has encouraged owners to continue investing in their properties.

## CHINESE COMMUNITY

The Chinese community in the South Cove has undergone significant changes in the last decade both physically and socially. Since 1960 there has been a steady decline in population from about 4,000 to only 1,600 in 1970 due to the construction of the expressway, the Turnpike, and the initial demolition in the South Cove Urban Renewal project. In the last 5 years the population has started to rise again with construction of 660 units of housing in the area and the rehabilitation and conversion of other units. Presently the best estimate is that there are nearly 3,000 Chinese in the neighborhood. The Chinese population in Boston and elsewhere in the U.S. has been rising rapidly due to changes in immigration laws that have allowed many more Chinese families to immigrate into this country. The recent immigration has changed the social character of the community which up until now was somewhat characterized by single, middle aged and elderly men. Generally, the new families are larger than the city-wide average. Overall the community is poor, with the average family income in 1970 being \$5,400, and 63% of the families earning less than \$6,000. The heavy demand for housing near the heart of the community, the lack of enough new housing, and the low incomes have resulted in a housing shortage. The 1970 census showed that 72% of the households had more than 1.01 persons room vs the city average of approximately 10%.

The Community has particular problems in the job market, due to the large number of people who do not speak English, 60 to 80%. The few opportunities for employment are in the area and metropolitan Chinese restaurants and in the neighboring garment industry. The estimated rate of unemployment is low, however the unofficial opinion of neighborhood workers is that much of the population is underemployed. In recent years the Chinese community has felt increasingly pressured from potential encroachment of the expanding downtown office and entertainment districts.



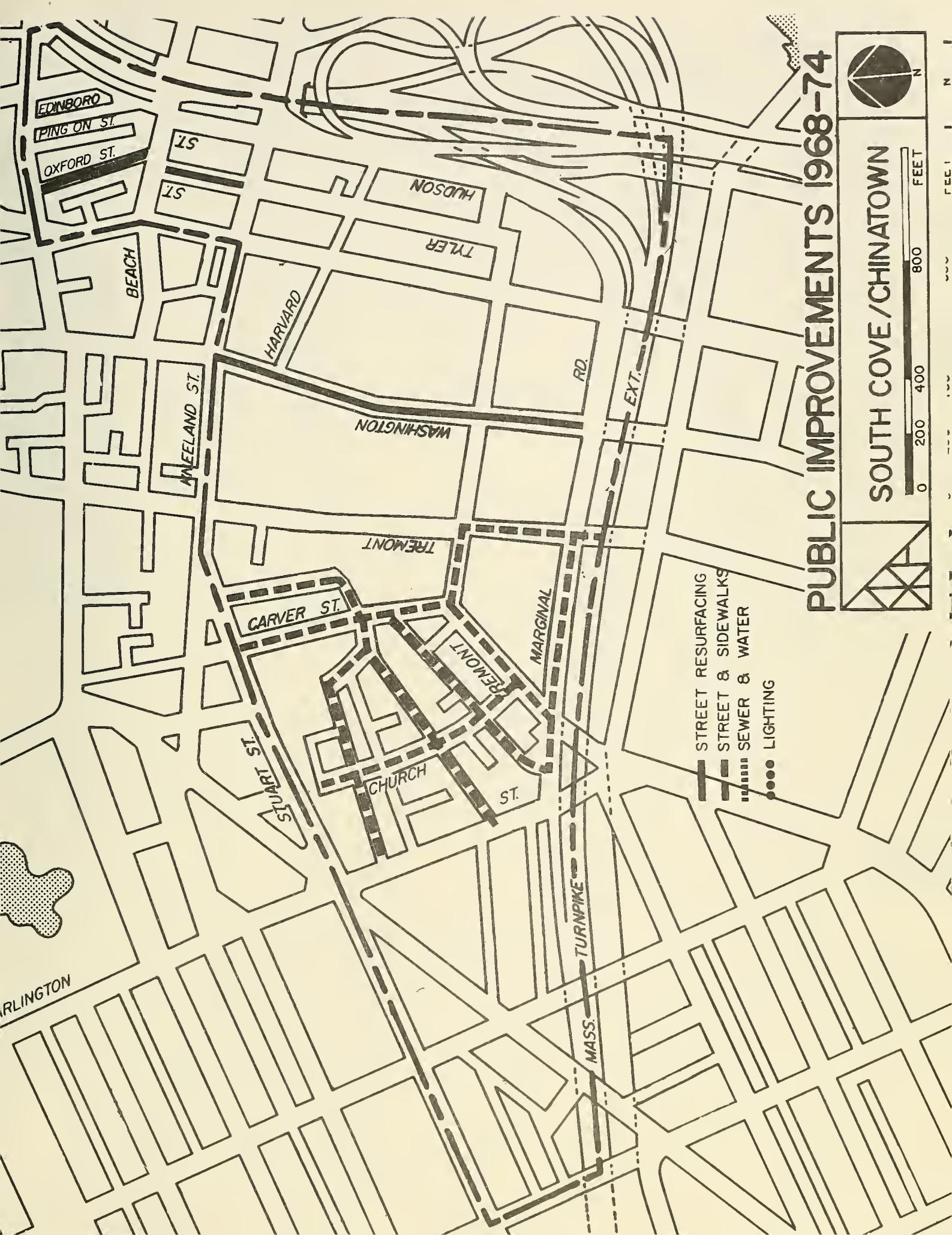
# PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS 1968-74

SOUTH COVE / CHINATOWN

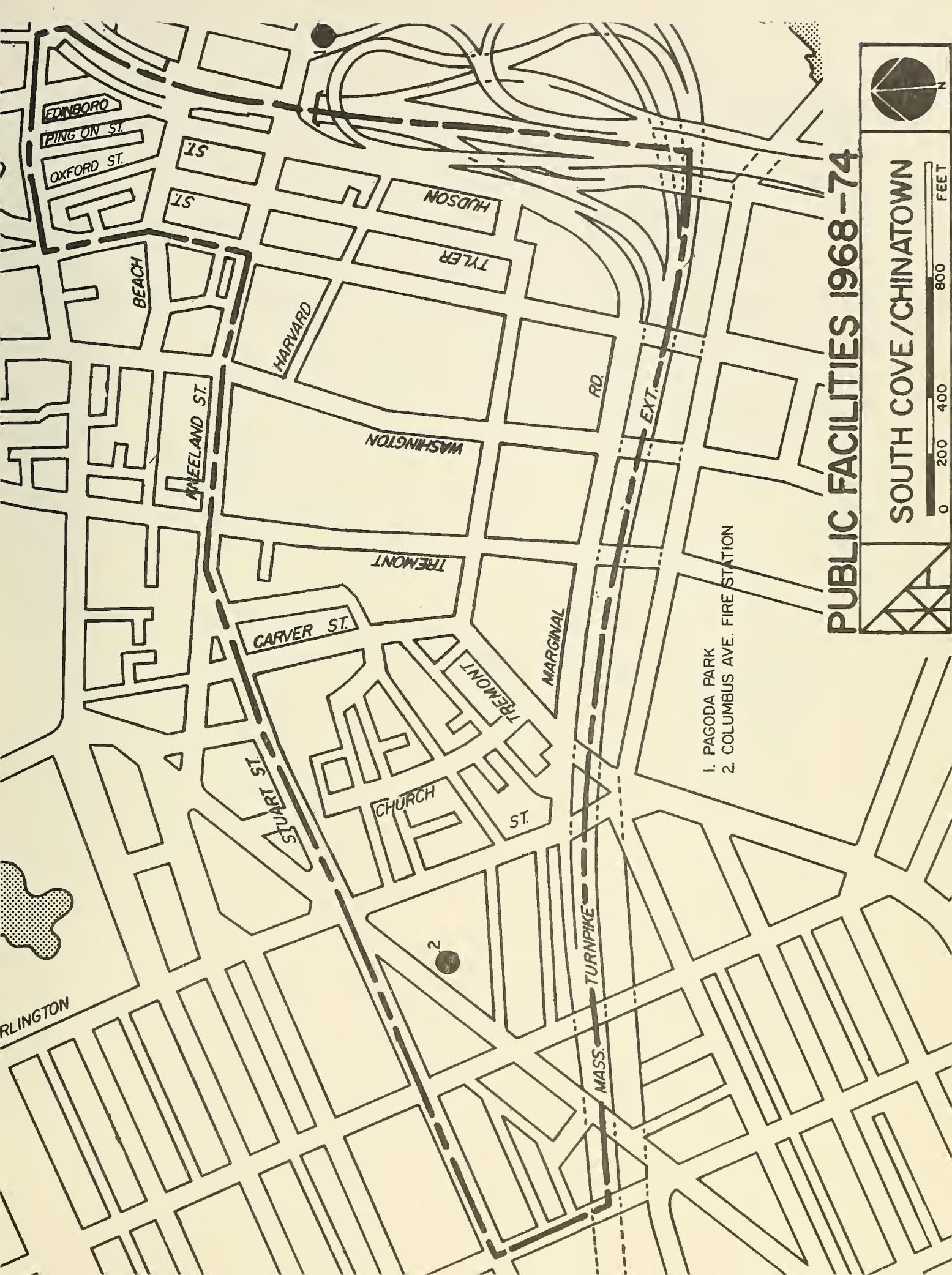
800 FEET

200 400

- STREET RESURFACING
- STREET & SIDEWALKS
- SEWER & WATER
- LIGHTING







HOUSING

Public

236 & 221d3

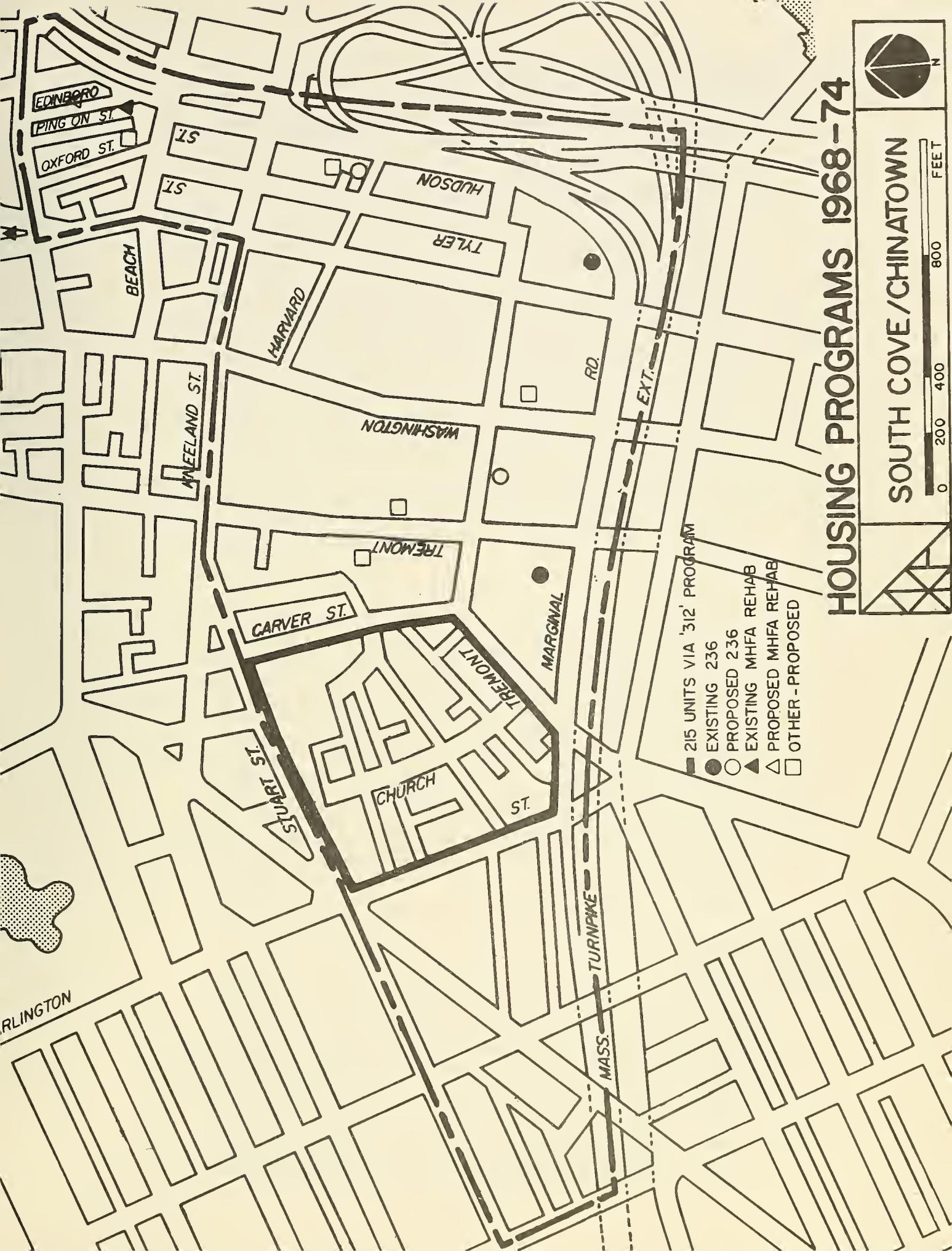
|                   |                                |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Tai tung village  | 214 units, fam. (1973)         |
| Mass. Pike Towers | 200 units, fam. (1973)         |
| Wong Family Trust | 24 units, fam. MHFA rehab (73) |
| Chauncy House     |                                |

In Planning or Construction

|                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Quincy Towers                 | 100 units, eld. (76)          |
| R3/R3a                        | 100-200 units (80)            |
| R1                            | 120 Bed Nursing Home (77)     |
| Chinese Christian Life Center | 90 units, eld. (77)           |
| Edinboro St. rehab(s)         | (MHFA preliminary discussion) |

312 Rehabilitation Assistance Program

215 units to date



## D. ISSUES AND PRELIMINARY STRATEGIES

### 1. IMPACT OF DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT ON CHINATOWN AND BAY VILLAGE

#### Issue

The South Cove/Chinatown neighborhood is unique in that while a very residential neighborhood, it is almost in the middle of the Downtown office and commercial core. The continued development and the expansion of the downtown has brought a number of real and potential problems to the adjacent residential area. The threat of land speculation and development pressures to the point that the land would be too valuable for residential use is very real, and combined with the liberal allowable uses in some of the zoning districts, the threat is now upon parts of the communities. Elsewhere the threat of speculation is more of a future concern. The potential of the entertainment district expanding, and the problems of the area are a concern. The threat of the Garment Industry, which is a major employer of Chinese women, being forced to move due to real estate pressure is now a very real possibility. The spinoff effects of continuing growth including increasing traffic congestion, construction activities and constant street disruptions from utility companies are a constant source of complaint.

#### Strategy

The strategy to insure coordinated and compatible growth in the whole downtown is a very complex issue, and the strategies are still in a preliminary discussion stage. Among the policies being proposed are the possible use of one or more zoning tools including a zoning rollback to a less permissive category, the delineation of a conservation district for the whole neighborhood, and/or a historic zone for Bay Village. The reaffirmation of the City to its commitment to the protection and assistance to the Chinese community could be used to dampen real estate speculation. The City can assist the garment industry through the coordination of city services, the provision of needed public improvements, and/ or possibly the assistance in relocating in the immediate area. The funding of capital improvements that will improve and strengthen the residential area will serve to reinforce the City's commitment to strengthen the residential areas.

### 2. HOUSING

#### Issue

The housing situation in the Chinese community at the present time is very poor, and unique among the city's neighborhoods. In spite of the fact that some of the housing in the Beach Street area is very run down and in need of major improvements, there is a very strong demand for any form of housing in that area. Furthermore, a large percentage of the population is in a very low income range, and can only afford the lowest of rents. A large percentage of the population works in the Beach Street area, and needs to be near the area to do shopping

as well as goods and services, since between 60 and 80% of the population does not speak English. Added pressure on the housing market comes from a constant arrival of new residents from Taiwan and Hong Kong. At the present time, there is a high degree of overcrowding in the area, and very little the city-wide programs like HIP or code enforcement can do to assist the area. Much of the housing is characterized by several (more than 6) units per building and they are often absentee owned.

### Strategy

The many and unique elements of the housing problems in the Chinese community do not lend themselves to solving via existing or proposed city-wide housing strategies. To properly address the housing problems of the Chinese community, it is proposed that a specific housing program be developed. This effort will as its' end result be intended to identify existing and new strategies of improving and expanding the housing in the community without forcing out the present residents. Among the specific proposals to be investigated will be rehabilitation programs for large, absentee owned buildings, coordinated rental subsidies, various inducements to convert non-residential buildings to housing, and alternative forms of tenant participation in the ownership of their housing.

## 3. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

### Issue

The Chinese community suffers from a combination of economic problems that as a net result have caused the residents of the area to have the lowest median income in the City, few alternatives to employment outside of the local restaurants and garment industries, and very limited opportunities for local business expansion. The causes of the problem include a large immigrant population that often does not speak English and often has low marketable skills. In turn, business opportunities to date have been limited to the restaurant business and what few local services the community needs, and the community has not participated in the expansion of the downtown office/service economy.

### Strategy

The main strategy is to bring a coordinated and comprehensive effort to bear on the problem of economic development in the community. Among the activities proposed is close city cooperation with the newly formed Chinese Economic Development Council. The City must make an effort to assist the garment industry and ensure that it remains in the nearby area. The City must encourage the expansion of Chinese employment opportunities and expanded business opportunities. Among the programs that should be pursued are the City's Commercial Center Revitalization Program. The promotion of mixed uses in new or rehabilitated housing should be explored. The effort in job training and English language instruction should be expanded.

#### 4. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

##### Issue

Due to the very dense development, proximity to the downtown core, and lack of open space and public amenities, the residential environment of the community is not particularly good at the present time, especially in the Chinese community.

While street lighting has been and is a capital program, the overall pattern of lighting leaves much to be desired. There is virtually no street landscaping in the community, and the only park is rather inaccessible and very limited.

##### Strategy

The Capital Improvements strategy calls for the majority of the expenditures to be residentially related improvements. Street lighting should be continued onto Edinboro, Kingston, Harrison, and the Over Artery. Street trees for screening are proposed along the expressway and the turnpike, and along Kneeland street. Sidewalk improvements including benches and pedestrian improvements are proposed for Beach Street. Additional funding will be required over and above the 1975 CIP to make the Beach Street passive area a symbolic entrance to the community. The feasibility of using all or part of parcels R3/R3a for an active recreation area for the community and the adjacent community school should be investigated.

#### 5. AIR QUALITY IN THE SOUTH COVE

##### Issue

Recent reviews by HUD of housing projects in the South Cove have raised the question of the air quality in the area, and specifically, the suitability of the area as a residential area. The opinions to date have been based on what appears to be very sketchy data, and the conclusions are very open to question. However, the issue has been raised, and the time to investigate air quality is not at the end of the planning on each specific housing proposal. The threat of HUD delay or rejection because of air quality reasons makes housing that much harder to get built in the area.

##### Strategy

It is proposed that the City apply to the Environmental Protection Agency for \$20,000 to undertake a detailed testing and analysis of the existing air quality conditions, projection of future conditions, and finally a detailed analysis of the turnpike and expressway corridors for suitability of housing on a site by site basis. Furthermore it is proposed that the community be made aware of the problems of adverse air quality and be encouraged to lobby for this study, as well as implementation of measures to improve the air quality in the downtown.

E. 1975 INVESTMENT PROGRAM

The investment program in the South Cove/Chinatown area is primarily aimed at improving the environment in and around the residential areas. The City's Capital Improvement Program includes the improvement and expansion of the Beach Street passive recreation area, and improvements to Pagoda Park. The old Quincy School will be donated for a Chinese community center, and the new Quincy School will have extensive community facilities. The provision of new street lights will be continued on three streets in the Beach Street area, as well as the complete rebuilding of several streets in the Hudson-Tyler Streets area as part of the Urban Renewal Project improvements. The Chinese community has been targeted for \$75,000 in HIP effort.

# 1975 INVESTMENT PROGRAM

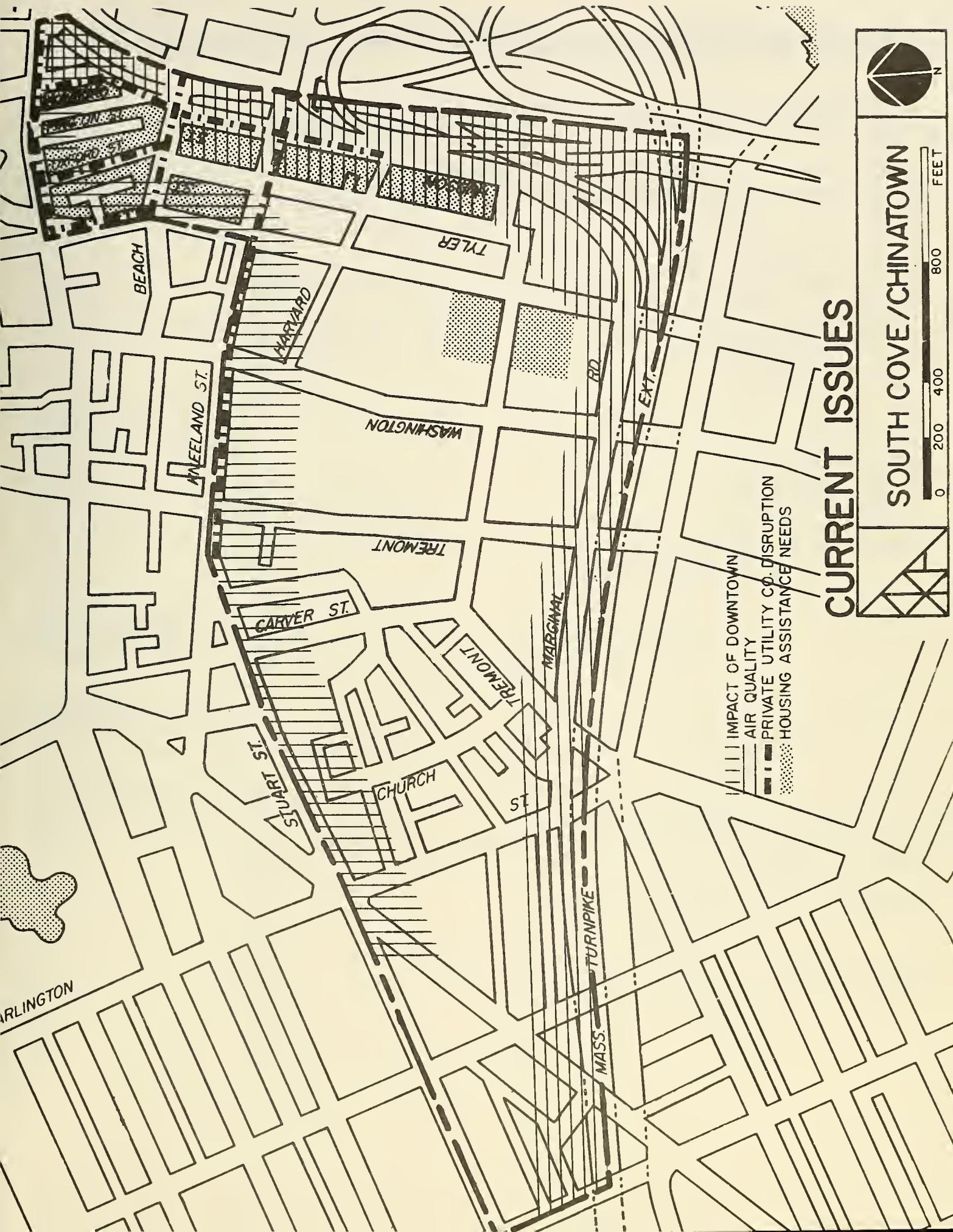
SOUTH COVE / CHINATOWN

0 200 400 800 FEET

1. 94 UNITS-ELDERLY HOUSING (HUD)
2. NEW QUINCY SCHOOL
3. OLD QUINCY SCHOOL
4. SOUTH COVE PLAZA
5. PAGODA PARK
6. BEACH STREET  
STREET IMPROVEMENTS

● LIGHTING





FUTURE INVESTMENT NEEDS as related to issues, strategies and 1975 Investment Program

| Issue   | Strategy  | 1975 Investment Program          | Future Investment Needs   |
|---|---|----------------------------------|---|
| <u>Housing</u>  |   |                                  |   |
| a) Quality of the existing stock is very poor   |   |                                  |   |
| b) overcrowding due to housing shortage & very low incomes  |   |                                  |   |
| c) continuing influx of new res. who due to language & skills disadvantage must live near Chinatown | Develop Housing Program for Chinese Community             |                                  |   |
|   | 1) Preservation of Existing Housing<br>a) MHIP type prog. | \$75k, 50 units                  | Street, open space improvements near housing                          |
|   | b) Rental subsidies                                       |                                  |   |
|   | c) MHFA Rehab   | MHFA interest on Edinboro Street | Renovation assistance for non-resident owners with low income tenants |
|   | 2) develop additional housing for increasing population   | Quincy Towers-114 unit eld       | Rental assistance (Sec. 8 & Sec. 707)                                 |
|   |   | Christian Life Center            |   |
| <u>Economic Assistance</u>  |   |                                  |   |
| Low median income (\$5,400/fam.)  | Expanded job training (including new development)         |                                  |   |
| Limited skills, language problems   | Coordinate public improvements                            |                                  |   |

FUTURE INVESTMENT NEEDS as related to issues, strategies and 1975 Investment Program

| Issue   | Strategy  | 1975 Investment Program  | Future Investment Needs  |
|---|---|--|--|
| employment opportunities  | Encourage garment industry to remain near the community<br><br>Promote mixed use rehabs                 |  |  |
| Garment dist. needs   | improved parking  |  | Use of Jordan/Lafayette garage   |
| Commercial area   | Encourage expansion of commercial activity  |  | Street lights, neck downs, neighborhood commercial assistance  |
| <u>Impact of Downtown Development on Chinatown &amp; Bay Village</u>      |   |  |  |
| Land speculation due to Jordans, downtown expansion, etc.                 | zoning rollback<br>-Conservation District<br>City Policy Statement<br>Historic District for Bay Village |  | Chinatown Housing Policy<br><br>City commitment to future residential improvements, amenities        |
| Perception by residents of potential expansion of entertainment district. | Liquor license policy<br><br>Public Relations Program to reiterate City's policy                        |  |  |
| Relocation of Garment District  | City assistance in relocation, planning   |  | Land assembly, relocation assistance; transportation assistance                                      |
| Traffic, Parking pedestrian circulation                                   | Close Beach Street<br><br>Improve Kneeland St. pedestrian crossings                                     | \$50,000 in '76' CIP<br><br>\$2.8 million U.R. Improvements to Kneeland/Stuart | Add'l capital improvements to Beach & adjacent Streets<br><br>Pedestrian Actuated lights, neck-downs |

FUTURE INVESTMENT NEEDS as related to issues, strategies and 1975 Investment Program

| Issue  | Strategy   | 1975 Investment Program  | Future Investment Needs   |
|--|--|--|---|
| Construction disruption from private utilities | - City insistence on coordinated planning  |  |   |
| <u>Capital Improvements</u>                    |  |  |   |
| Recreation & open space                        | Improve existing facilities<br><br>Develop small open areas<br><br>Convert Old Quincy School to communicate  | Beach St. \$50,000 in '76'<br>CIP Pagoda Park<br>S. Cove Plaza \$600,000<br><br>City to donate Old Quincy School for community use | Improve access to Pagoda Pk. State DPW assistance for Beach Street passive area<br><br>\$3-400,000 for temp. ball-field on R3/R3A While 'E1' is still up<br><br>Urban Design treatment for Beach Street |
| Streets & sidewalks                            | Continue Street Program<br><br>Improve ped. system<br><br>Coordinate street signing  | U.R. Street Improvements   | Develop Parcel RI for mini-   |
| <u>Air Quality in the Downtown</u>             | Study existing & future condition<br><br>Raise community awareness of the issue<br><br>Reduce local & thru Traffic thru street closings, traffic rerouting |  | \$10-20,000 for air quality study of Mass. Pike/X-way corridor  |



